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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

24 February 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: David B. Low
National Intelligence Officer at Large

SUBJECT: Prospects for Use of Chemical Weapons by Iraq Against Iran Over the Next Six Months

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1. Iraq began an aggressive program to produce CW munitions in 1981. Chemical agent precursors, munitions, equipment and expertise were purchased in Western Europe and Egypt with a view toward development of both mustard and nerve agents.

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2. The mustard program was successful, resulting in at least a small scale production capability and a stockpile of perhaps 70 agent tons by mid-1983. The nerve agent program lagged behind the mustard program, although small quantities of lethal nerve agent have been produced and tested.

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3. The first large-scale use of an agent by the Iraqis was in July 1982, when mortar rounds loaded with CS (tear gas) were used effectively to break up an Iranian infantry assault.

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4. Initial use of mustard agent occurred in July 1983, when President Saddam Hussein reportedly authorized the use of mustard agent and, some 50 250-kilogram bombs filled with mustard agent were used along with tear gas to retake a mountain. Iraqi commanders used mustard again in October 1983 during an Iranian attack.

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5. Baghdad on Tuesday of this week threatened to counter the anticipated major Iraqi offensive with new weapons. Iraq almost certainly will resort to widespread use of mustard agent to help blunt the offensive. As grave as this assessment is, I am equally concerned about another aspect of this situation which is emerging, i.e., the potential capability to use nerve agent by late this summer.

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6. There are two major Iraqi chemical warfare facilities. Salman Pak, located 20 kilometers south of Baghdad, is the smaller CW facility, probably used for research and development and small-scale production. Full scale production will occur at the larger facility near Samarra, 70 kilometers northwest of Baghdad. This complex is isolated, very well secured, quite extensive and nearing completion.

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7.

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Mustard is already being produced at the site, so it is considered likely that this is chemical processing equipment for the production of other agents, probably nerve agents. These analysts estimate that the equipment could become operational in six months.

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8. This situation has many potential implications, such as:

-- the use of lethal nerve agent would breach a significant CW-use barrier

-- the Iranian reaction is unpredictable, ranging from efforts to obtain their own CW capability to terrorism directed at real or imagined Western "suppliers" of this capability

-- the prospect of Iraqi supply of agents to other Arab states or to terrorists

-- Israeli nervousness at this elevation in Arab weapons capability (another preemptive strike?).

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10. Actions:

-- A NID article is already being drafted which will cover some of this ground. I will see that technical briefings are made available to appropriate intelligence managers.

-- I will explore with NIO/NESA whether a Community paper is called for.

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[redacted]

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-- You may wish to alert key policymakers of the potential for nerve agent use by Iraq late this summer. [redacted]

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David B. Low

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